

CLASS WAR



THE GREAT APPEAR GREAT BECAUSE
WE ARE ON OUR KNEES... LET US RISE!

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CLASS
WAR
IS
DEAD

... LONG
LIVE THE
CLASS WAR!

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Class War is dead... Long live the class war!

Welcome to Class War number 73. This is the last issue of *Class War* that will be produced by the existing Class War Federation. But before you rush off and top yourself in despair, let us explain why this is, and give you an idea of how we see the future. We have always said that Class War is different from all the other political outfits in Britain. The biggest difference between us and them is that in Class War we have never had any intention of setting ourselves up as leaders; we were never some vanguard wanting to seize power. Most other political groups only really want one thing – that is the power to tell you what to do for their benefit, not yours. In these pages you will find a no-nonsense, sometimes tough analysis of our failings. We are doing this because we feel our class needs a far better political perspective than those currently on offer from the Left – including Class War.

The whole point of Class War was for ordinary working class people to take control of their own lives back from the parasites who think they own this country. So why are we turning it in after 13 years? We are not. What we are about is looking ahead to something bigger, better and altogether more unpleasant for the ruling classes. Basically the paper and the Federation have gone as far as they can in their present form, and it's time for something new. As far as we know none of the usual political parties have ever dissolved themselves, but then, as we said, our politics are different. In order to make more sense of this we need to go back to the beginning of Class War and explain again what we've been up to all these years.

Class War was started in the early 1980s in London by a small group who soon linked up with like-minded people and formed a national federation in 1985. We were sick of the whining lefties from CND or the Labour Party who were down on their knees pleading with the ruling class to be a little less horrid in the way that they rule the country. We were inspired by the principles of anarchism to raise the flag of direct class conflict because we know that it's the only way our class can win its freedom. To do this we have to push the middle class out of the way. In the 1980s that meant having a go at all the trendy lefties and pacifists, and so our main issues were class politics and violence.

Politicians, then as now, have no time for ordinary



working class people; they even try to tell us that we don't exist any more. Class War set out to upset their cosy political world and bring real politics back into the real world. We set out to challenge all the bullshit of 'official' politics by getting back to basics with campaigns like 'Bash the Rich' and supporting any attempt by working class people to have a go at our rulers. This meant siding with the pickets during the miners' and printers' strikes. When most politicians were telling those workers to give up, or negotiate, we stood for them fighting the police who were doing the bosses' dirty work.

Our paper was written in everyday language and we made it entertaining to read. This horrified the lefties because no-one ever read their papers, and ours was something ordinary people did read. *Class War* was a real hit and we sold all the papers we could print. At its height we were selling 15,000 copies, and to be honest we could hardly believe it ourselves! We took the trouble to get *Class War* sold in quite a few newsagents in working class areas which helped to reach ordinary people that most lefties didn't even know existed.

The next important thing we did was to get our ideas across to real people and we found out how easy it is to use the media. By the time the poll tax riots came along, the media thought we had a massive membership and the police practically blamed us for organising all those riots! This showed how out of touch they are because all those people who rioted were quite able to do it themselves and didn't need Class War, or anybody else, to lead them.

The truth is that Class War never had more than about 150 members and for most of the time the membership has only been about 50 people. Now we may be pretty wonderful people but we are not super-revolutionaries. What Class War did was to act as a channel for class politics which struck a chord with people involved with those struggles at the time. We gave a voice to attitudes and feeling within our class that had been denied and ignored by the political world for too long.

The point of all this is that we only designed Class War for a limited purpose and we now think it has outlived its usefulness – it's getting in the way of people putting together something far bigger and more useful to our class.

We have to look at what has been good about

Class War – and what hasn't – so that we can learn lessons for the future. One of the best things that Class War did was to aim at ordinary working class people living in the real world. Class War members were mainly working class people who had some

experience in revolutionary politics and wanted to make something more useful to our class. Unlike most lefty parties we never had university academics or upper class drop-outs running this organisation. Our members live and work in the real world and we were able to use our political skills to bring our politics back into the real world. We steered clear of the strange and isolated twilight zone of extreme left wing politics and ignored the fantasy games of the existing Marxist parties. We also avoided the pointless trap of middle class student politics and let the SWP carry on with its job of pandering to that section of society. Our politics are in total opposition to their left wing elitism, and we fight for working class power so that we can manage ourselves.

We focused on what life was like in our communities and after decades of compromise we tried to give our class back a sense of pride. One of the problems we ran into is that lots of people do want us to be their saviours. But the last thing we want to do is to make people think 'leave it all to Class War, they'll sort the bastards out', because we can't and won't. Our aim was to help people to find a way to attack our rulers and organise their own lives. This will not happen if people think that others will do it for them.

The Federation remains a tiny group with a big image which has outlived its usefulness. The truth is that we will never grow any bigger in our present form. The appeal of our paper has become too narrow and limited – we have only sold between four and five thousand papers each issue for the last few years. But because it is still there, we can't move on to something better. We now need new ways of organising that can appeal to the whole working class, young and old, men and women, black and white. With a wider base in our class and a better vision of the future, we can build up something much more useful than Class War. This means looking for common ground with all class struggle libertarians and looking forward to the battles of the 21st century.

At the moment, we have more questions to ask than answers to give. But we don't see what we write here as an admission of failure or as a rejection of everything we have said and done in the past. Instead we see it as a progression, part of a process. Class War and the Class War Federation have only been one attempt by one small group to move our class forward. We have gone as far as we can: the time has come to try something new. ●

POSTSCRIPT

Sometimes you don't know whether to laugh or cry with Class War. Our most bitter rows have always been amongst ourselves, and the ones during the production of this paper are no exception. After six months of increasingly personalised arguments, the majority of London Class War have decided to part company with the rest of us and have gone their own way. We wish them luck. From the start, the members concerned were suspicious of the ideas expressed in this issue of the paper: while the overwhelming majority of the Federation see these ideas as an exciting way of moving forward, they saw them as a threat. In the end both sides realised that the situation had become unworkable and they decided to walk out. Ironically all this has come at a time when we are calling for an end to the often petty disputes that beset the anarchist scene.

Blame as always ties on both sides – we do not pretend that we have behaved like angels in pushing for our ideas. But in truth the dispute had been brewing for some time and a walk-out was probably the healthiest option. At the same time we are aware of no fundamental political differences between ourselves and the comrades who have left: in many ways the whole incident has simply strengthened our argument about the weakness of the Federation and the need to update our strategy. The spirit of this paper is that revolutionaries in this country have no choice but to find ways of working together. The dispute has obviously left wounds, but we hope that these will heal sooner rather than later.





The second coming

An open letter to revolutionaries

PISSING IN THE WIND

We've had 18 years of unrelenting anti-working class government, 18 years of unceasing attacks on the interests of working class people by the state and the agencies of capitalism. Gains we fought for in the past are being slowly, and sometimes rapidly, eroded. We're heading towards a more brutal and uncertain form of capitalist exploitation, in many ways reminiscent of earlier times. The opposition – and by this we mean everybody who has an explicitly revolutionary outlook on the problems of the world – is few in number. We are marginal, fragmented and declining in influence. In short, what passes for a revolutionary movement in this country is pitiful.

At a time when an unbelievable amount of shit has been dumped on our heads, you would think that working class people, angry and pissed off, would flock to groups such as Class War in droves. Sadly this is anything but the case. After almost 15 years of sometimes intense and frantic activity, Class War is still tiny in number and, as far as many in the organisation are concerned, going nowhere. This issue of the paper will attempt to address some of the serious problems that beset Class War in particular and 'the movement' in general. We want to get some kind of debate going and get the revolutionary

movement back onto more solid ground.

At present we concern ourselves with, and write about, a million and one things – the Job-Seekers' Allowance, Bosnia, fascists, the declining rate of profit, whatever. But as important as these issues may be, there is one question above all others we should be asking ourselves. That is, if our ideas are so brilliant, why do we collectively amount to so little and have so little influence?

It may be hard to believe right now, but revolutions are a common feature of history: they have happened in the past and they will happen again in the future. Two recent and close-to-home examples of revolutionary situations are the events of the late 1970s in Italy and those of May 1968 in France.

Despite what some people may say, we still live in a society that is divided along the lines of class. The material interests of the great majority of people, the working class, are opposed to those such as James Goldsmith, Anita Roddick, Richard Branson and Cedric Brown. This is an opposition based on economic, social and political grounds. The class struggle is a fact of life. As long as we live in a capitalist world people will fight against it – we are left with no choice. By fighting against it there is always the possibility that we will go beyond the limits of the class struggle and overthrow existing society. This is

what we mean by 'revolution' and we look forward to it.

GANG WARFARE

Sometimes it seems as if there are unwritten rules about what can or cannot be said in a publication like *Class War*. In this issue we intend to break those rules. Here we come clean. What we mean is that self-criticism/analysis is rarely a feature of revolutionary publications part of the practice of would-be revolutionaries. It is therefore long overdue. In the Class War Federation we freely admit that there is a problem, even though we are equally sure that many will seek to deny this. Some people may even find it shocking or disturbing. But our intention is to be open and very honest, even if this means saying the unsayable.

Too often we look at things and do things from the perspective of 'group patriotism'. Too often there is this sense of loyalty to your own organisation above everything else. With this goes a sense of one-upmanship, of trying to get one over on each other, and of regarding any problems as lying elsewhere. The attitude is: 'We're OK, we're sorted. If only everyone else was like us, things would be brilliant.' We see

Preaching to the converted?

This paper marks a departure in style and content: every past issue has been written to be read by, for want of better words, ordinary working class people. We have attempted to write for those who were 'unpoliticalised' – it's a loaded word, we know, but we take it to mean people who wouldn't generally buy a left-wing newspaper, anarchist or otherwise. The paper and the politics of Class War have been described as 'populist' in as much as we have attempted to write about what really concerns people, as opposed to what we think should concern them, in a jargon-free, down-to-earth, humorous manner. We believe that we've had some success in this respect. Class War was a paper written for ordinary people, not for anarchists. It wasn't filled with obscure articles guaranteed to baffle the uninitiated, it wasn't written for some ultra-left clique. Class War attempted to do something other than preach to the converted.

This final issue of Class War is different. It is written for all those who already consider themselves 'political', whether they regard themselves as anarchists, communists, socialists or whatever. This Open Letter is directed at everybody who is genuine in their desire to bring an end to this class-divided capitalist society that we live in, and who is open, honest and flexible in their attempts to achieve it.



A rose by any other name

Class War has never allied itself rigidly to any one tradition – we have always taken our ideas from everywhere. We are not concerned with what something calls itself but with what it is and what it does. So this paper is written for the revolutionary movement in general, for want of better words. To simplify things, we refer to ourselves here as anarchists with whom, in the broadest terms, we have much in common. But we are 'anarchists' with the class struggle at the centre of our politics and we believe in the mass self-activity of the working class. So, on the one hand, we are very close politically to many who call themselves 'socialist' or 'communist' (or neither of these terms), and on the other, there are 'anarchists' with whom we have no agreement.

these things, this attitude, as being an enormous and fundamental problem.

We say openly and quite clearly that there are problems with Class War. We also know that we have said and done many things that were wrong, and that therefore we have been part of the problem. But then isn't it inevitable to be wrong sometimes? Isn't it part of a learning process? And of course, the only way to ensure that you are never wrong is to never do or say anything. There are too many groups and individuals around who are constantly negative, who never have anything good to say about anything, who can't wait to slag off Class War (and others) whenever we have taken some initiative and put our heads above the parapet.

Every political publication in this country has had its tuppenny-worth's of slagging Class War, and very little of it could be called comradely! Fair enough, we have shouted our mouths off and we have no problem with criticism where it's deserved. But at times it has been just plain ridiculous. Over the years we've rattled a lot of cages on the Left, though we've always tried to steer clear of sectarian slagging.

The Class War Federation is not perfect; no group or organisation ever could be, although some ultra-left types act as if a perfectly coherent theory and practice were possible. We say that it isn't. One of the common criticisms of Class War is that we don't have an agreed 'position' on Ireland or unions, for example, that Class War members have had differing points of view. In fact we have always regarded it as a strength that there was no line, no dogmatic position. Although we are prepared to admit that problems have arisen because we have been an open church, nobody has yet been able to answer the question of how you get from A to B, from here to a revolution, with entirely pure and coherent politics. What happens when we confront the revolutionary masses of the working class and they don't subscribe to ideas perfectly conceived by Bordiga or Malatesta in the 1920s, or they don't have the 'correct' line on Ireland? Does the working class spring fully formed out of some revolutionary womb? We think not.

What happens when we confront a working class full of contradictory ideas, maybe confused, reactionary even, as well as genuinely revolutionary? Do we get involved with what's going on? Or do we refuse to be tainted? We reckon the revolution could happen and be over before some so-called revolutionaries would dare to get involved. The fact is it won't happen according to preconceived plans, and at some level it will take all of us by surprise. But we will be even less prepared if we don't start talking openly and honestly to each other.

As we have said, we are part of the problem and we can't, and shouldn't, ignore it any longer. Class War is overburdened with baggage from the past: the myths, the lies, the illusions, the fantasies have all become millstones around our necks. They paralyse us and stop us achieving our goal – that is, playing a small part in facilitating a working class revolution that sweeps away capitalism forever. Basically, Class War is no longer able to function as a useful political organisation.

That Class War is at a low ebb is nothing new – we have shot up and down like a yo-yo throughout our short history. We have been down to a bare handful of people before (the period before the poll tax comes to mind). The fortunes of Class War have always waxed and waned in relation to the course of the wider class struggle. But Class War was born and shaped in the mid-1980s and what was valid then is no longer valid or appropriate now. The world moves on and, believe it or not, we intend to move with it.

KEEP IT SPIKEY?

Class War was designed with the intention of alienating the middle class and mainly pacifist Left. While their newspapers emphasised victims, *Class War* emphasised fighting back. They had bloody demonstrators and strikers, *Class War* had *Hospitalised Copper*. *Class War* advocated returning the aggression of the immediate enemy, the police – something which many working class people do anyway. Strangely, this emphasis was unusual, but it was legitimate then and still is. We should remember that the police were created as a body charged with the task of keeping us in line – that is what they are there for. They may also give tourists directions and help old ladies across the road, but the bottom line is that they are an obstacle in the way of what we want and what we wish to achieve. Revolutionaries who do not accept this basic fact are digging their own graves.

If there is a serious political change in this country (or elsewhere) there will be violence. In itself violence is not a good thing, it is sickening. But the wealthy and powerful will not give up their privileges



While the Left emphasised victims, *Class War* emphasised fighting back

of their own volition, we have to make them. History teaches us that they always fight back: the American capitalist JP Morgan once boasted that he could pay one half of the working class to shoot the other half. The world is a violent place, but we didn't make it so, that's the way capitalism is. The lock-out of Merseyside dockers is violence, child prostitution is



Class violence is nothing new – even in the 'peaceful' 1926 General Strike, scab vehicles were attacked and destroyed

The Left and Class War

It has sometimes seemed that the entire left press has existed for no other reason than to slag off Class War. At many times this has appeared obsessive: one paper, *Red Action*, has distinguished itself in this respect by slagging off anarchists in general, and Class War in particular, almost continually for years on end. For the ultra-left groups it seems that life would

become meaningless if they didn't have us to whinge and moan about. Other groups have had a more sinister intent behind their often bizarre and hysterical criticisms of us.

When we laid into *Militant* for offering to grass up poll tax rioters they wrote in their paper that when we abused their leaders we were "abusing the democracy of the working class". They even accused us in October 1990 of wearing wigs on demo's to cover up our "short-cropped scalps"! This was

Militant joining in with the long-term smear campaign *Searchlight* has been waging against us. This started in the mid-1980s when the M15-influenced magazine reported that 'senior police officers' had told them we were all Nazis! (And as we all know, the police never lie). Over the years particular journalists have continued this fiction, despite (or perhaps because of) it being an obvious smear. As recently as Spring 1997 *Searchlight* were busy embellishing this sad old lie. *International Times* (March 1986) did an excellent piece on *Searchlight's* M15 links and its smear of Class War, as have various other publications.



THE SECOND COMING

I'm Spartacus!

Revolutions are always started by a minority. The whole thing has got to kick off somewhere. The working class in its entirety doesn't wake up one morning and think 'Let's have a revolution today!' Initially, it is always a minority of working class people who are involved, though this doesn't mean the intention is to assume a position of power. The role of revolutionaries in this situation is to facilitate working class people taking power as a class. The task of revolutionary groups is to broaden it out and get ever greater numbers of people involved because real change can only occur and last when the majority supports it and believes in it.

violence, the prison system is violence, living in a cardboard box on the South Bank is violence. We could go on ad nauseam. We don't have to justify our so-called violence - let others justify their passivity. We would much rather the world could change in a peaceful way but we believe it is unlikely if not impossible.

Violence or non-violence is a line drawn by the state and the media. The state decides what constitutes violent struggle and urges instead non-violent and constitutional means - reformism. We don't determine what passes for common sense in this world - after all, it was deemed perfectly reasonable for the USA and Britain to drop bombs from 852s from five miles high in the sky onto Iraqi civilians, for the SAS to kill unarmed people in Gibraltar, and for paratroopers to shoot unarmed civilians in Derry. But advocate throwing rocks at the cops on a demo or strike and you're vilified as a violent bunch of nutcases!

Violence is a tactic though, not a strategy. We are in favour of mass working class violence, out in the open; not created or led by Class War or others, but developing according to its own dynamic, as a means of self-empowerment, a means amongst others of giving people a belief in their ability to overthrow the state. The violence of a working class community in struggle is always preferable to that of an elitist armed struggle group.

Despite what we've said, it doesn't mean there are no problems with violence in a political context. It's not something to be taken lightly - Class War's problem has been that we have done exactly that. Class War has been known for its violent image, something that we have all too readily played up to. This has been detrimental to the many other things that we have said, things that have no connection with a violent approach - sexuality, drugs, to give just two examples.

It has been said within Class War that every emphasis became an over-emphasis - maybe we are just too casual as regards such things. On occasion, the paper has become a parody of itself and Class Warriors have tended to fetishise violence. Worse, this has led to us under-emphasising struggles that didn't involve violence. The glorification of violence ended up attracting people who were more interested in talking about fighting than changing the world. Any attempt to steer Class War into territory where people actually thought about what they were doing, and why, has been taken as being 'soft' and 'liberal' (and even 'middle class') by those who refused to see further than violence. This has created a constant tension within the organisation. On many occasions Class War's macho approach has in turn alienated many people, especially women.

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE...

This brings us to another of our problems, the lack of women within Class War - although it has to be said we are



not the only organisation with this problem. Ironically, when Class War was first started, half the people involved were women. Unfortunately it's not the case now. Of course there have been some women involved over the years, but sadly they have always been a minority. We have always said that women were just as capable of getting stuck in as men and this has been proven many times. But the fact remains that there are not enough women within Class War. Maybe as we attempt to change ourselves we will be able to rectify this and in future work together on a more equal basis. But it has to be said that there may be some cultural aspects of the problem that are beyond our influence.

In many ways we have faced a similar problem with respect to black people: Class War is, and always has been, an almost exclusively white organisation. Maybe black people's reluctance to get involved with revolutionary groups stems from their experience of being manipulated and patronised by middle class white leftists. Maybe the overwhelmingly white cultural emphasis of anarchism and Class War is also a reason. And, of course, there is the straightforward fact that racism exists within our society and black people are therefore suspicious of getting involved in what is in effect a white movement. We don't have any easy

All it needs is one little chink in the armour of capitalism for the situation to change beyond all recognition: the anti-poll tax movement is a good example

answers to this problem. We have tried many times to put it right but always with a lack of success - we are open to suggestions.

SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM

When Class War was started it was never conceived as anything other than a step along the way. No political organisation is an end in itself - all organisations degenerate eventually. When you have to put more energy into maintaining the group itself than pursuing your original goal, then it is time to stand back and reflect on what you are doing.

There is a certain ultra-leftist or situationist point of view that is antagonistic to all forms of organisation. This point of view believes there is some pure, untainted (by the likes of us) working class out there that will at some point rise up spontaneously. Bollocks! If there is a fundamental shift in the political situation in this country, then groups like Class War will be involved out of necessity. If you seriously believe that a revolution will occur without political organisations being involved, then you're wrong. Organisations may or may not be a hindrance according to what they say and do, but recent events in eastern Europe show that social upheaval on its own is no guarantee of a better world.

Part of the problem is that many revolutionary organisations insist on seeing themselves as somehow separate from the working class. Class War has always opposed this idea. We are very



much part of the working class – not some mythical homogenised working class but one that is atomised and fragmented, with differing but ultimately common interests. We're not on the outside looking in but very much part of it.

We realise that the experience of the recent past has been bad for many people. We have had a series of what at times has felt like unending defeats. Many people are demoralised and just keeping their heads down.

But we are revolutionaries and we have a dream of a better world. We're also revolutionaries because we know that revolution is the only real answer to the problems in our lives. Because of this, we have no choice but to fight. We all know the possibilities that exist... For every person who is actively involved, there are dozens who have moved away but still keep those ideas of revolution.

Again we have to be clear about things and say the unsayable: revolution is not on the agenda at the present time. Maybe the best thing we can hope for is a small upturn in the class struggle in this country. Of course, most people's perception of revolution is at least partly shaped by the disastrous revolutionary experiences of this century, above all in Russia and China. Everybody knows that Stalin was scum, everybody knows that the secret police were running the show and the negative consequences of these experiences are incalculable. Most people are aware that the world in which we live doesn't work in their best interests – direct experience rams it home every day of our lives. But capitalism continues to exist at the moment because the majority accept it as being 'reality' or 'common sense', and until they begin to challenge or question this fact, we're stuck with it. Most people know that the world is shit, what they lack is a belief in their abilities to change it for the better – and that could come very quickly, almost overnight. All it needs is one little chink in the armour of capitalism for the situation to change beyond all recognition. The anti-poll tax movement is a good example. To begin with, it was 'just another campaign' – nobody expected it to become so massive. So maybe revolution is just around the corner, after all... The point is it's impossible to predict.

'MUST TRY HARDER!'

We live in the world's oldest capitalist country that ironically has one of the most backward political cultures. Maybe the passive and conservative outlook of so many working class people in this country is partly the result of the frozen theme park society that we live in with institutions that are rooted in the distant past. Even in capitalist terms the institutions that govern us are becoming untenable – they need



more efficient, up-to-date ways of exploiting us, and what they have instead is a backward-looking and fossilised mess. And at a time when the monarchy appears to be on the way out, any attempt to tinker with it may mean the whole edifice will fall apart. Maybe the system we see before us is a house of cards.

At the moment, those of us interested in revolutionary ideas are few in number and have a limited influence. Class War has always believed in screaming from the rooftops and has always acted on the belief that we can make our own history, that we can change the world in the here and now. Anarchism or communism is not some torch that we carry for future generations, something that we wait maybe 500 years for – it is something which exists in what we actually do now.

We have always believed that we can have an effect. But if the rest of the working class aren't up for it, we can't force them and no matter how loud we

shout, this isn't likely to change in the short term. Over the last ten years too many people in Class War and elsewhere have fallen into the trap of thinking that 'one more leaflet' or 'one more picket' will magically bring success. The end result has been burnt-out, disillusioned cynics.

But it is not just the wider world that we are concerned about here, it is ourselves and others who are like-minded. Because within the pond that we (the Left) inhabit we can have an enormous effect. But we are split into tiny groups, riven by sectarianism, dominated by personalities, refusing to work together, refusing to talk, spending too much time fighting each other. Are we revolutionaries or are we fools?

Is it any surprise that the working class as a whole gives revolutionaries (that's us, remember) a resounding thumbs down? Being a revolutionary is not exactly an attractive prospect – harping on about the past, stuck in dogma, unable to act co-operatively

Middle class? Fuck off!

The relationship between revolutionary politics and middle class people has been a perennial problem on the Left/anarcho-scene and a problem that sometimes borders on obsession with some working class revolutionaries.

Marx said that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself – if we want to be free, we've got to do it ourselves. It is a statement we take literally. Despite what some people may say, Class War has always been overwhelmingly composed of people from working class backgrounds. Middle class people have been – and still are – involved, but they have always been in a minority and this is how it should be. If you have a revolutionary organisation and it is comprised predominantly of middle class people, and they hold the positions of power as a result of their better education, greater confidence, and so on, then clearly this is a big problem. Most of the Left is like this – the SWP are a prime example.

On the other hand, is it possible to make a revolution in which only working class people participate? Is it possible to create a purely working class organisation? We suspect that it isn't. After all, how do you determine who is allowed to get involved? Do you have a class-based means test or is it down to intuition? What about the numerous grey areas? This doesn't mean that we don't know who the enemy is, but nor is everything black and white.

The problem arises because in our day-to-day life we do not directly confront the ruling class. Those who really run society never put a foot outside their heavily protected worlds. For most of us, our immediate enemy is the middle class: management, social workers, magistrates, teachers and all the other functionaries of capital. This is no accident. Part of the reason why the middle class arose was to act as a buffer zone between us and the ruling class, as a first line of defence for the bosses. But the middle class, as traditionally defined, has also expanded massively over

the past fifty years, partly with the growth of the welfare state, but mainly because we have been encouraged to forget our class position and call ourselves middle class. If we recognise that some 'middle class' people occupy contradictory positions, it doesn't mean we're ditching class politics.

So how does a group such as Class War relate to middle class people who are committed and have proved themselves? Do we tell them to fuck off, or that they can only make the tea, or do we accept what they can offer, at least until proven otherwise? Of course, if they are running the show then that's a different matter. But this problem has become an obsession with some people: this has only led to a negative outlook and political paralysis because people are defining themselves in terms of the individuals they are against rather than what they are for. We believe that this issue is a red herring (at least within Class War) and we get tired of having to deal with it.

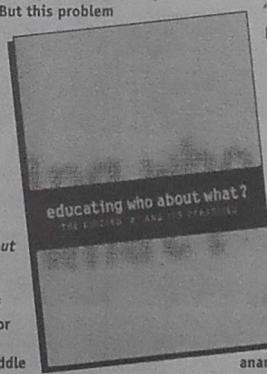
A prime example of this sort of attitude is the recently published anonymous pamphlet *Educating Who About What?* This is a searing rant against the middle class dropouts, 'academics', and other lifestyleists who inhabit so much of the anarchist ghetto. They lead the author to conclude that '90% of the anarchist movement is a joke'. The presence of middle class elements and 'politicos' is seen as almost entirely to blame for the failings of the whole anarchist movement, and in particular the various national anarchist groups and networks. The movement gets slagged off for being a social club for misfits, dropouts and social inadequates, and for being far removed from the working class.

Many of the pamphlet's statements are so blindingly obvious that it's impossible to disagree with them, and the

author is right to raise all those uncomfortable issues that the revolutionary movement needs to face. However, it's also true that *Educating Who About What?* contradicts itself again and again: it's laid out as a series of vitriolic slogans and very personal statements, rather than as a coherent argument. It tends to oversimplify and generalise on too many points – for instance, the author demands a purely working class organisation to overcome middle class infiltration, but makes no real attempt to define either middle class or working class. Who would decide who can join or not – the author? In fact we suspect that the 'middle class' is composed primarily of people who disagree with the author, regardless of their real class...

This work could have been much better if the bloke who wrote it had not allowed his own petty jealousies and dislikes to interfere with what he had to say. He is someone who has been close to both Class War and the band Chumbawamba, so it's pathetic that he wastes so much space smearing both with lies and distortions (we could write pages and pages about this, but to be honest it would be a waste of time...).

As we said, *Educating Who About What?* is symptomatic of a lot of the muddled thinking about class that passes for 'theory' within the anarchist movement. We hold our hands up here and admit that Class War has done little to make things clearer. Too often we talked and acted as if class is something totally static and unpolitical – 'you either know it or you don't'. We unconsciously swallowed the most obvious stereotypes of class and acted as if it was all 'common sense' – the working class was composed entirely of young white blokes on council estates, and class was all about culture and background... Which is fine if you are a young white bloke, but fuck-all use if you're not.



THE SECOND COMING



Meet the new boss... same as the old boss

with each other or in an autonomous manner. The average person's concept of a revolutionary is someone who is at best a muddle-headed dreamer. At worst, revolutionaries are seen as devious, lying, manipulative and only in it for themselves.

Are we satisfied to be in our small but dogmatically perfect groups? And why are we so chronically unable to work together, to form a functional revolutionary movement that can seize the initiative from the ruling class? Maybe there are bigger problems in some quarters than others, but in the end these problems affect us all: we are all responsible.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

On the other hand, the situation is not as bleak as we've painted it. In many respects the field has been cleared for libertarians and there are historic new possibilities. The mainstream political parties are held in unprecedented contempt. Large numbers of people refuse to participate in a political system that gives them no real say in their lives. Whatever pretensions the Labour Party had to being a working class party are well and truly over. Sure, millions of working class people have just voted for Blair and his cronies, but how many really believe in them? How can you believe in something which is in effect an upwardly mobile bunch of middle class people, who think themselves eminently qualified to run our lives?

The Labour Party has always worked on the basis of a nice cosy capitalism that works in everyone's interests. But it isn't like that, and never will be. This time they didn't even wait until they were in power to make it very clear whose side they're really on. The influence of the unions is at an all-time low and so their ability to have a

negative impact and limit working class struggles is diminished. (In saying this we don't mean that unions are monolithic organisations that always act against the interests of working class people – there is a great deal of difference between union members and union leadership.) This also means that in many ways we are more vulnerable to capitalism's worst excesses. Strong trade unions were very much part of the post-war 'consensus': alongside other institutions, their main function was to dampen class struggle. The working class was both protected – we had a health service, social security, full employment, etc. – and imprisoned.

More importantly, Stalinism is dead with the Trotskyists not far behind. We cannot underestimate their destructive influence within the working class since 1917: there must have been upwards of 50,000 people through the ranks of the SWP alone. How many people have they managed to put off politics for life? The Trots parrot out a theory and practice conceived in the clandestine conditions of 19th century feudal Russia. It was absurd in the past and now it's plain reactionary. Nobody needs them or their leadership. Maybe, finally, we can snatch Marx back from these worthless Leninist usurpers to make what use of him we can. As these political traditions are confined to the dustbin of history the opportunity finally exists to create a uniquely British revolutionary politics suited to conditions here and now, not a load of baggage from the past foisted upon us from above, from another time, another place.

This politics may have to be 'European' of course, or something else. We're certainly not suggesting we can ignore what's going on in the rest of the world or that a global proletarian revolution isn't necessary. The world as it was has changed, the working class as it was has changed. In this country fewer and fewer people work in manufacturing. Fewer people have full-time secure jobs – casual labour and part-time jobs are now very common. We live in a global economy

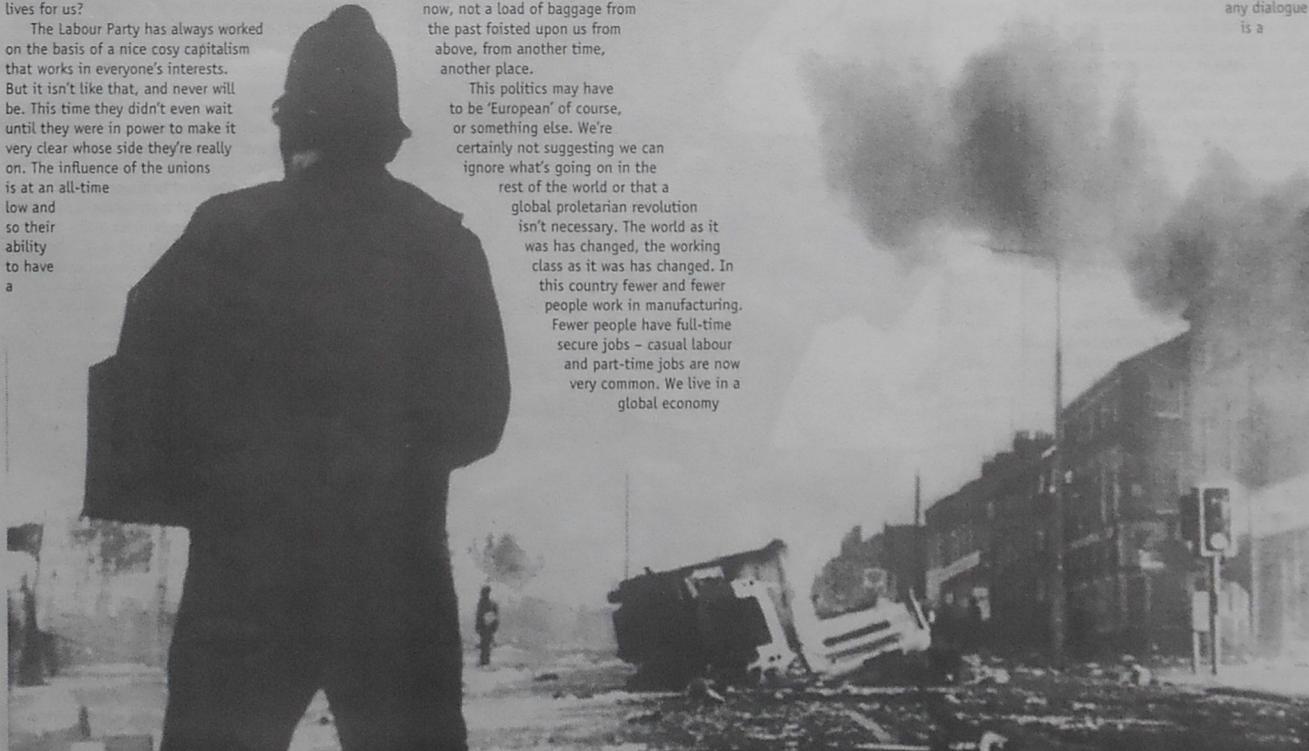
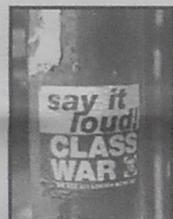
and the nation-state is in decline. If we allow capitalism to continue to exist, maybe the differences between the First and Third worlds will diminish, and exploitation and misery will be uniform the world over. The world is already dominated by huge transnational corporations, with annual turnovers larger than many countries' gross national product, moving production to wherever it is economically and politically advantageous.

The world may have changed beyond recognition but, then as now, it's still capitalism. The conditions that gave rise to the great social movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries are still in place – ironically, nothing has been reconciled. We still live in a world riven with anxiety for most of us. Now as then we sell our ability to work in return for a wage, and most of us are but one or two pay cheques from destitution. Clearly the working class has changed but we never saw it as a static concept in the first place – it has changed continually throughout its history. Capitalism tries to contain us and we change: capitalism changes us, we change ourselves, and in our turn we change capitalism – this is class struggle, the motor of history, as Marx put it. We are changing now, possibly (hopefully) in the direction of challenging some of the ideas that dominate our lives. What is clear is that old 19th century ideologies are largely useless when it comes to understanding this world as we enter the 21st century.

In this situation the possibilities for non-authoritarian anti-capitalist politics are enormous. It would be criminal of us to ignore, or waste, this historic opportunity to move from the margins of the Left into the mainstream of it. We suspect that there could be more support for anarchist ideas than any of us have ever dreamed of. We only need to find some effective means to tap into most people's natural tendency towards an anarchist way of doing things.

In the immediate future we see some hope. Working class expectations will be higher under this new Labour government, expectations that Labour will be unwilling and unable to meet. We can seize this opportunity if we use some imagination, if we step outside our sometimes self-imposed straitjackets, if we talk to each other. Genuinely revolutionary politics is about breaking down barriers, not putting them up. It's about optimism, looking for opportunities and possibilities; it's about challenging ideas and 'givens', not being hidebound by romantic images of change, past or future.

But we must be realistic, we must see the world for what it is, not through rose-tinted spectacles. This isn't a call for anybody and everybody who simply calls themselves an anarchist or libertarian to come together. That would be pointless. The bottom line of any dialogue is a



recognition that society is divided along the lines of class.

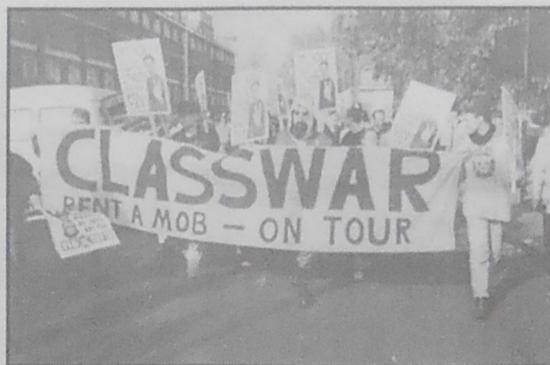
What we see is the possibility of achieving something very modest, not the immediate influx of thousands, but the creation of a base for doing something bigger and better. This is an attempt to marshal our movement's resources. We'd like to see a regroupment, a realignment, of all the serious libertarian revolutionary forces in this country. At the moment we are massively underachieving: we can do so much more, be so much more.

Let's make it crystal-clear: this isn't some underhand attempt to get everybody to join Class War, Mark II. If it's seen as such, then that partly underlines the problems that we have mentioned above. As far as we are concerned, Class War as it existed has finished. It is now time to move on. We want to do something completely new, though we're not entirely sure what that is. Perhaps we need to get away from the old-style political group with its newspaper, its meetings and its leaflets. Maybe we need to create some new forum for communicating more effectively, to initiate things. We must attempt to draw in the numerous individuals who have similar beliefs but are inactive, uninvolved – and this includes all the readers of our paper, past and present.

WHAT'S THE STORY? JACKANORY

One of our problems has been that many people have been under the belief that Class War is this enormous organisation. This could be seen as a sign of both our success and our failure. They believe we have thousands of people about to go on the streets and fight, that we are a group of super-active individuals who do it for them, an essentially passive readership. The truth is that Class War, in its entire existence, has never had more than 150 members, and membership numbers have often hovered around the 50 mark.

When people have got involved with a false idea about the size and the influence of Class War, they have tended to become disillusioned very quickly. It hasn't helped when, at times, we have played up to that enormous-organisation, super-active image. We



At times, we have played up to that enormous-organisation, super-active image

have also suffered from the illusion that we could or should become a mass-based organisation. With hindsight, we have to say this has always been hopelessly wide of the mark, and politically undesirable in any case. These illusions of ours haven't been helped by the fact that a couple of times in Class War's history it really did look like we were about to take off in a big way. But we always come back to earth with a resounding crash (we dare say the state had a hand in it a couple of times as well).

PUNK'S NOT DEAD

A strength and weakness has been our ability to recruit people who would never in a million years dream of joining any other left-wing or anarcho group. This is connected to the 'extreme democracy' that has existed within the Federation. People could get involved and be writing for the paper within a couple of months – there's never been any central committee to pass through. This has been a source of strength, but has also caused problems. Many people who became involved had a low level of political awareness, which in turn has caused mayhem within our ranks. A 'kick it til it breaks', anti-intellectual, anti-theory mentality has been prevalent within the

Peace off!

Class War came into being with the aim of sticking the boot into anarchopacifism and lifestyle politics. We had some success in this respect – although, ironically, we have gone full circle and these things have returned once again.

You could say that not much is happening at the moment – a low level of struggle. But anybody who is digging tunnels below would-be motorways or making their home in a tree would probably disagree. Don't get us wrong: we applaud the anti-roads movement and their actions, for their daring and their imagination. They have cost the state millions of pounds and forced a significant curtailing of the road-building programme. This is good. But a problem with this movement is that it is overly based on lifestyle, the way you dress, what you eat, etc. We have to be concerned with more than that. How do people who live out of the back of an ex-BT van, usually young and often from privileged backgrounds, relate to people who have jobs, mortgages, families, etc. – i.e. most working class people? Is such a lifestyle an option for the majority of people? How do you break out of a ghetto of self-imposed marginalisation, or is that ghetto an end in itself? The only kind of politics worth anything is that which breaks down barriers.

Environmental destruction, and the car society with roads built everywhere whether we want them or need them, are the result of an economic system that puts the accumulation of capital and profits before people. Ultimately, bringing an end to capitalist social relations is the only answer. Activism and taking a morally superior stance might make you feel good but won't bring about any significant change.



organisation. This has been an obstacle.

Class War has always been rightly paranoid about ending up like the Left parties and sects, defending particular unchanging theoretical positions and traditions, regardless of how much things have changed since 1917 or 1936. We set out to avoid this, but fell into another trap – defending a rebellious 'attitude' and 'image', rather than looking at what's wrong with the world and how we can best intervene to change it. In many respects it's true to say that Class War failed to become much more than a 'punk' organisation.

All these factors combined to make the Federation an organisation that has been incredibly conservative and resistant to change. At certain critical periods we failed to seize opportunities to re-invent ourselves and to take our political organisation and ambitions on to a higher stage. For example, the International Conference which we hosted in London in September 1991 brought hundreds of revolutionaries together, but offered nothing new. For some of the organisers this was not a problem: the conference was an end in itself. Yet in retrospect, it must go down as a missed opportunity.

More recently, we have been unable to respond to the upsurge in environmental/anti-roads activism or the rave/free party 'counter-culture' that partly overlaps with it. The 'anti-intellectual' culture within the Federation has stifled real political debate and left us mouthing the same slogans as ten years ago.

But, having said all that, we still feel that we have done an enormous amount even within the limitations of our organisation and its practice. And the question remains: if just fifty people achieved this much, what could we have done had there been five hundred of us or five thousand?

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

We believe that our propaganda has had a resonance and an accessibility almost unique on the British Left. Class War has always said that politics didn't have to be dour and boring, that it's a mistake to take yourself too seriously, that we should use our imagination and have a bit of fun in what we do.

Of course, with the best will in the world it's not always good times and sometimes political activity is a pain in the arse. But we don't believe that politics should be self-sacrificial, and we have always argued against so-called 'professional revolutionaries'. The 'full-time' activist is trapped in a fucked-up social relation as much as anyone else. In our experience, this type of activist ends up splitting themselves in two, separating their own individual and social needs from their actions. It is a trap we have all fallen into at times – it's easy to forget the (personal) reasons why we can't stand the present world, and to forget the impulses that make us revolutionary in the first place. Class War always argued that life is politics and that politics is life in an attempt to avoid the robotic alienation of so much of the Left.

We believe that a great deal of what we have said politically has been right. Our task is still one of getting rid of capitalism. What we mean by that is getting rid of money, wage labour, commodities, the market system, and all of the other social relations of capitalism. The world we put in its place will be stateless.

We have always attempted to dispense with leaders, although any form of organisation is fraught with difficulties and some people shout louder than others. We even have a term for it within Class War: the dictatorship of the big mouths. However, we do recognise the fact that in certain situations some people come to the front and take the initiative. But this doesn't mean that they then have any god-given right to determine everything that happens from then on. The problem with the world is not leaders, it's followers, as we in the Class War Federation have learned to our cost on a couple of occasions. We believe that future society should be non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, organised along the principle of from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs.

Maybe some people reading this will get the impression that we are consumed with guilt for past crimes against anarchism, maybe for the sin of having talked to the media and welcomed their attention. But it's not like this for us; we're coming clean about our problems and mistakes in the hope that this will encourage others to do the same. We have had enough of the way that Class War has been. We believe that until we go through some movement-wide soul searching, and take a long, hard look at ourselves, then we are all condemned to go along the same tramlines, carrying out political activity within our own little ghettos and with an equal and singular lack of success. A regroupment of our forces is



Class War and the media

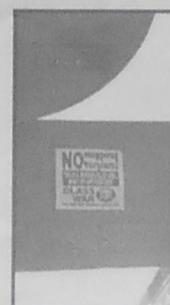
Class War has been criticised for being populist or even media whores. But what does 'populist' mean, apart from wanting our ideas to be popular, and aiming to make them that way? We've even been criticised for selling our paper: apparently it's a 'Trotskyist' tactic. But why produce a paper if you just want it to gather dust in someone's back room?

We do concede that there have been problems as well as advantages arising from our populist strategy and attitude to the media. One of the permanent problems of libertarian politics is that we are unable to measure the impact of our efforts. In authoritarian groups like the SWP success is measured almost purely on recruitment to the party or paper-sales. For the rest of us, the effects of our efforts are more hidden and there has often been a temptation to see our reflection in the media as a guide to our success: at times we ran the risk of getting a distorted view of what was really going on in the world.

It's easy to be seduced by the effect you can have on a naïve and ignorant media. It can be a revelation to find out how stupid and lazy most journalists are, and by playing up to their prejudices you can get media attention with very little effort. Sometimes this can work out brilliantly. When a Class War member was interviewed on the news and called the Trafalgar Square anti-poll tax rioters "working class heroes" this struck a chord with many people.

But there is a danger of having campaigns that only consist of grabbing media attention. This can lead to a lack of credibility, when people see through the bullshit. Two examples prove the point in different ways. During Euro '96 Class War produced some stickers which were sent to the media with the name 'Class War Hooliganz' on them. The press picked up on them, but as the group never existed, before or after, they were seen as little more than a joke. On the other hand, after the 1996 Hyde Park anti-CJA riot the media reproduced our 'Keep It Spikey' leaflet, with tips on how to behave if the march turned into a riot; in effect, the Sun just reprinted and distributed four million copies of our leaflets. If 'Hooliganz' was a typical arse-about Class War media stunt, then 'Keep It Spikey' was its complete opposite – the publicity was a bonus but not the aim of the leaflet.

Meanwhile spare a thought for all those penpushing expense-account journalists: for years they've been able to blame us for every piece of trouble that's happened, reprinting the same old article about 'blood-thirsty bootboys' again and again. Hearing that Class War was coming to an end, one journalist recently phoned up our Hotline to complain. "How can you be dissolving??? You're the most successful group on the left!" she said. "If we're so successful," replied our telephonist, "how come you're still around?"



possible and greatly overdue. It could be as ambitious as we care to make it. We all deserve more than we have now.

REVOLUTIONARIES AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS TO REVOLUTION

In his article 'Anarchists and other impediments to anarchism', the veteran US anarchist Bob Black argues that anarchism as it is now, rather than being an attempt to change the world, is a highly specialised form of accommodation to it, and that if they were ever to encounter a real revolution, anarchists would run a mile! In our estimation, this is very astute and all too true of many anarchists that we know. People become 'politicised' for all sorts of reasons and not always for the most obvious one of changing the world to something better. We are not interested in anarchism as a hobby or as a way of being superior to others who haven't yet had the good sense to become anarchists themselves. Some people would surely regard an upsurge in our numbers as a threat since it would undermine their 'superior' status of anarchists. We could do without people like that and maybe this is an attempt to sort out the wheat from the chaff even in our own ranks.

We dare say that many will read this Open Letter with glee and look with pleasure at the trouble that they perceive us to be in. But we don't care too much what such people think of us: if you get a kick out of the mess we're in, then the joke's on you – it's on all of us. It may be a naive cliché to say that we are all in the same boat, but it's true. The only thing that matters on our journey is the destination itself. Organisations come and go and no organisation is bigger than the struggle itself.

No group or organisation that currently exists is up to much. We see nothing that lives up to our expectations. Once upon a time there was a large, determined and sometimes violent revolutionary movement in the United States that involved hundreds of thousands of working class people. Now there is hardly anything. What is left are a few lifestyle anarchists. But at least people in the States have the knowledge that their movement was physically smashed. Over here, we are simply in danger of letting what's left of ours waste away. If we refuse to recognise this, we have no chance of reversing the decline.

Rosa Luxemburg once said that the class war is the only war in which eventual victory will be secured by a series of defeats. Someone else said that we only have to win once, whilst the ruling class have to win time after time – very true. Class War is not producing this final issue of our paper because we feel in any state of despair. We look upon what we're doing now as a positive move at a time when there are many possibilities. We are attempting to reach as high as we possibly can. We see that as being entirely in keeping with the traditional big aims of Class War.

Our goal is to bring an end to the global domination of capitalism, to create a classless society, a human community that fulfils our hopes, dreams and aspirations. To achieve this we have pretensions towards making a worldwide revolution – and yet we, several hundred of us, find it difficult to work with each other on even a limited basis. Does this inspire confidence in our own abilities or in the probability of it ever happening? Surely the way we work with each other now should be a reflection of what we want to create, something for working class people to look at as an example, as an inspiration.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Times are hard for working class people at the moment. We're all being told to tighten our belts, and most of us have no choice but to do just that. These are hard times for revolutionaries too.

As revolutionaries we need to take a long hard look at ourselves and our movement. We need to go back to that question: with times so hard and party/reformist politics so bankrupt, why aren't people getting involved? This final issue of *Class War* is our attempt to spark a wide-ranging debate on this issue.

The future is open. Most working class people know the conventional parties can't offer them anything. Stalinism is dead, and it's clear that without Stalinism, Trotskyism and Leninism won't last much longer. The possibilities for a new revolutionary libertarian movement are endless, if only we put aside our quibbling and use our imaginations.

We're looking forwards. We plan to work towards a regroupment of all serious revolutionary forces in Britain, a realignment of the whole revolutionary movement. In the short term, over the next year or so, we are planning a series of conferences to discuss all these issues (see page 16). And after that... who knows? It's our world, let's seize the time. ●

The party's over

The state of the Left in 1997

The Left in Britain is at its feeblest for decades, probably since the mid-1960s and maybe even since WWI. And yet this is at a time of lowering living standards and worsening working conditions, and when the institutions of social, economic and political control – the government, police and monarchy – command the least respect since the Victorian era.

Both Stalinism and social democracy have virtually disappeared in Europe in the last decade, and where once the labour movement stood to defend workers there is now a massive political vacuum. The concepts of nations and states are in turmoil with moves both for a federal Euro-superstate on one hand, and the devolution of power on the other. While on the fringes of Europe a 19th century battle for nationhood is being fought, in the heartlands of England and Germany national sovereignty is fading as global capitalism, and its institutions, consolidate.

All this should provide a fertile breeding ground for the Left, yet they have been haemorrhaging members and whole organisations over the past decade. It is the firm belief of groups like Class War that much of the Left's irrelevance in this country is down to their sterile and conservative dogmatism and resulting political organisation. Clearly though, there are massive economic, political and social changes going on locally and globally that have had far-reaching effects on the political culture of this country. The Left have been totally incapable of developing new politics and new methods of working or making propaganda. They have no response to the changes in society, let alone the growing ecological world crisis. They ignore changes in the workplace and changes in the way young people think and behave; with their myopic vision of the industrial worker they fail to see the strengths and possibilities in today's fragmented society.

The labour movement has been devastated and this has had massive consequences for the Left. They have almost entirely lost their factory base, and the more general social changes and the change in political climate have increased their isolation. Of all

Seven years on and Militant still haven't tracked down all the poll tax rioters...



The Left have been totally incapable of developing new politics and new methods of working or making propaganda

the main left or anarcho groups only Class War has tried to adopt new types of 'propaganda', at least since Rock Against Racism influenced 'punk' Socialist Workers. In fact Class War's 'new' style is itself now dated, to the 1980s miners' strike/inner city riot/anti-yuppie era. Just as capitalism never stops moving, so we must never stop refining, updating and inventing. We won't get there by standing still.

Before we take a look at various left and anarcho groups, there are some general points that need to be made. Most importantly is that the majority of people who join these groups genuinely want to do something to change the world, whether they be middle class students or more importantly working class people. For this they are to be respected. Our criticisms of the Left are not directed at these people, the rank and file, but against the sterile politics and ossified leaderships that define these sects. However, nothing is ever that simple and sadly, apart from the vast majority of recruits who eventually leave, many revolutionaries get caught up in a 'siege mentality' and generally lose touch with the very ideas which attracted them to revolutionary politics in the first place. This 'mentality' can affect all of us, but in left groups it is actively encouraged. With a siege mentality developed, the members are more likely to do what they are told and accept an absence of debate and democracy. Along with this comes the obsessive need to defend the 'organisation' above all else.

It may seem clichéd to talk about 'the means justifying the ends', but talk to any hack in any far left group and they will waste hours of your time talking black into white and that the mass slaughter of whatever (including most other left groups) is justified, as it will lead to their group gaining power and bringing on the new dawn of happy smiling faces etc. Of course, this sort of alienation can be found everywhere in the modern world, but leftist politics itself is a large part of the problem. Ironically, it's not just the left groups who are at fault with their belief that they are 'the vanguard' – the siege mentality and 'the-organisation-above-all-else' attitude has infected anarchist groups as well.

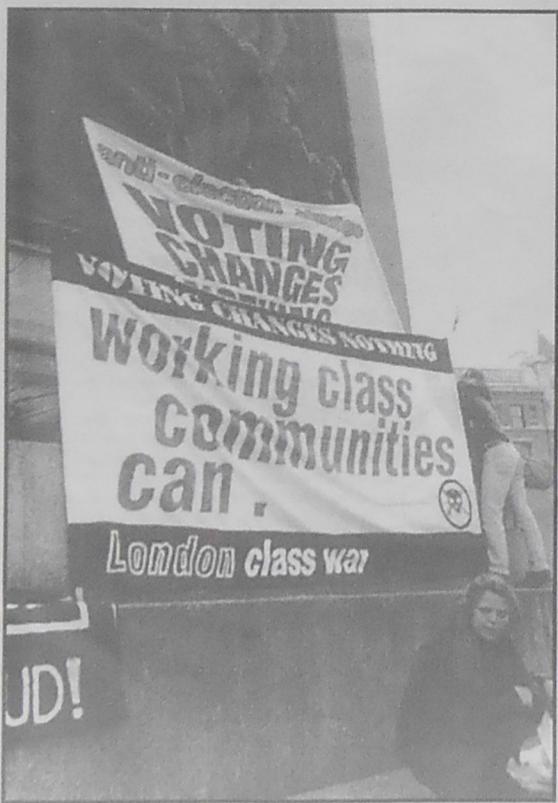
THE SOCIALIST PARTY (EX-MILITANT)

Militant were the most significant left group of the 1980s. They had over 100 councillors, several MPs, and influence and control over several councils. Today they have little or no influence in either local authorities, the Labour Party or their beloved labour movement. The history of Militant is a history of ideological schizophrenia. In the 1950s the group was a straightforward Trotskyist outfit. They entered within the 'parties of the working class', educating

and creating the nucleus that, when the conditions were correct, would emerge as Britain's revolutionary party. They would use 'transitional demands' as a way of politicising and developing revolutionary consciousness. These demands were ones that they knew capital could not agree to and therefore they hoped to show that only workers' control would bring 'socialism'. However, over the years tactics and theory got very confused and the majority of Militant supporters saw nationalisation under workers' control as a thing in itself and thought those who argued for real revolution were fools.

It was this contradiction that brought about Militant's defining moment and illustrated its failure as a left reformist party. This moment was the rate capping dispute in Liverpool in 1984-85 which ended in embarrassing defeat for them. Militant was also significantly involved in the campaign against the poll tax, and just as they learned lessons from the Liverpool fiasco, that bureaucratic and dishonest politics cannot succeed, this campaign showed the importance of open and honest politics based in the community. After Liverpool Militant were witch-hunted from the Labour Party – their true base. Their recruiting machine, the youth section of the Labour Party, was taken from them and what support they had in the union movement ebbed away as they became impotent. They had no option but to move toward organising in communities when Thatcher launched her attack upon local authorities and communities with the poll tax. Although Militant took credit for starting many anti-poll tax groups the campaign showed up the worst side of Militant – the bureaucratic and undemocratic practice learned and institutionalised during years of intrigue in Labour party politics. If Liverpool had lost Militant many supporters, then the poll tax campaign split them right open. Here, two very clear and different ways of organising were shown; and indeed during the early 1990s Militant split. The old leadership were routed, while hacks in the new Militant claimed that they haven't changed their fundamental politics, only material circumstances. In fact it appears that through changes in circumstances Militant themselves have changed.

For the better? Well they are more open and are more likely to work with other groups. However, they still retain some of the old Militant attitudes as well as most of their old political dogma. As the new Socialist Party they appear to be recreating some sort of Bennite left-Labour old school set-up. They are possibly the group 'most likely to do well' over the next few years, as they intend to become more community-based, but as ever, another dose of bureaucratic 'socialist' bollocks is the last thing people need.





CPGB

The Communist Party of Great Britain is finally dead and buried. By their continual defence of the indefensible they have been a disaster for the revolutionary movement for many years. Like other so-called 'communist' parties, their politics – like much of the Trot dogma – is not in any sense of the word communist, but some hybrid of state capitalist economics and totalitarianism. As the Eastern European regimes collapsed, the CPGB also collapsed, after first attempting to become a new champagne socialist party. Good riddance.

SLP

The Socialist Labour Party was set up in 1996 by a group of Labour Party old-timers. Militant tried to join but weren't allowed! Led by state socialists and ex-Stalinists like Arthur Scargill, it's heavily trade union biased and calls for the rebuilding of the welfare state and renationalisation of everything. Its strategy appears to be almost entirely electoral. In our post-Thatcher society, appeals to traditional labourism and a tired old leadership will fall on deaf ears. We believe that with neither an attractive ideology nor the people to create a vibrant movement the SLP is at best a sentimental reaction to New Labour.

new blood is good. The SWP is today the only noticeable group to use the word 'revolution' in their propaganda; not only this, they accept that a revolution will probably require the use of force and violence. However, they suffer from a number of fundamental flaws in their concept of revolution.

They believe in a sort of hotch-potch of Leninist and Trotskyist dogmas and critically in the concept that a revolution will only succeed if it's led before, during and after by one all-encompassing party (guess who!). They argue this from a position that a highly organised enemy (the capitalist state) can only be defeated by a highly organised single opposition led by a single vanguard party. We believe this is fundamentally wrong. It is more likely that a highly centralised state will be defeated not by a pale imitation of itself but by a decentralised, diverse and multi-headed opposition. The SWP has created an organisation with little internal debate or democracy, and worse, lacking any culture of critical debate. For a group that pays lip service to the idea of revolution it is ironic that they are totally lacking in imagination, freedom of expression and open discussion. The SWP is essentially a middle class party, representing those on the left of the middle class who believe capitalism is disorganised and 'unfair'.

ULTRA LEFT

The ultra left is unknown to most people in this country. They have important critiques of the Leninist-Trotskyist left but like those they criticise they seem unable to progress beyond some bygone age. Their language, style, dogmatism and sectarianism offer nothing towards the creation of a new revolutionary movement, however important a large majority of their politics remain. These include keeping alive the fact that non-Leninist revolutionaries were vital to the revolutions of the post-WWI era; that workers historically have supported non-Leninist revolutionary communism; in their opposition to nationalism in all its forms; and in their constant emphasis on the total destruction of capitalism.

RCP

We almost forgot to review the Revolutionary Communist Party, the most ambitious and arrogant group in the 1980s, because they have all but disappeared from sight. Internally they had a strong 'cultish' behaviour, and they became increasingly obsessed with developing their theory over political practice. They shut down their newspaper a few years ago to concentrate on recruiting ex-students through their magazine *Living Marxism* (now called *LM*). As any fool knows, if you lose the relationship between theory and practice you soon end up with your head up your arse. This appears to have been the fate of the RCP.

**RED ACTION**

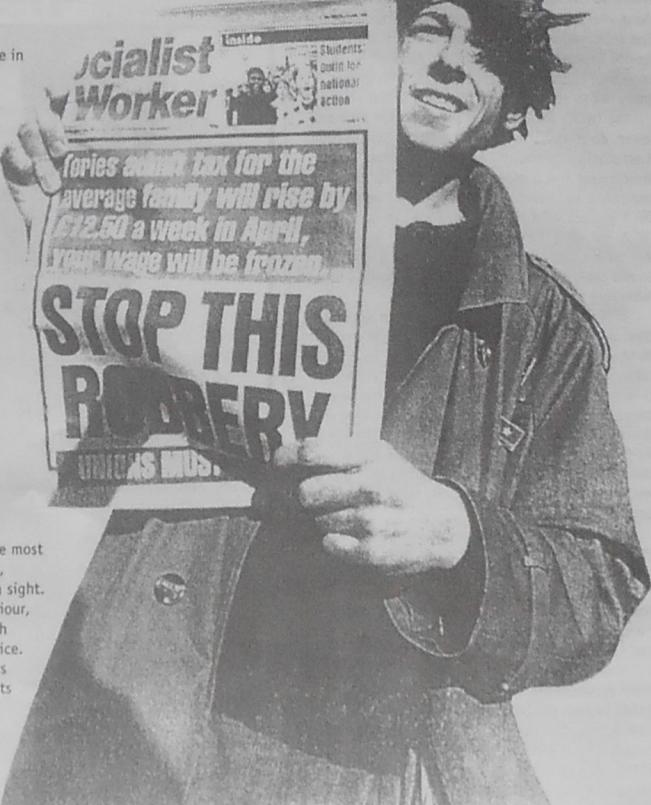
The working class has undergone massive transformation since the 1930s... but no-one remembered to tell Arthur Scargill

In 1981–82 a number of working class members of the SWP left, or were expelled, to set up a new group, Red Action. The pamphlet they produced explaining why they left and what the new group would be is an important one in the relationship of the Left to the working class. It documents clearly the failings of the SWP, especially how it alienates the majority of working class people who come into its orbit. Red Action portrays itself (very convincingly) as being a non-sectarian, non-dogmatic organisation well aware of the failings of the authoritarian left.

However, Red Action has also proved itself to be very much a bastard child of the SWP when it comes to how it relates to other left groups. It is also an excellent example of the double standards that much of the Left have. When it comes to this group the advice should be ignore what they say, and look very closely at what they do.

We have already mentioned the idea of the 'siege mentality'. With Red Action the siege mentality reaches a new height which they articulate with headlines like 'No-one likes us, we don't care'. This may very well be true, but since every edition of Red Action is obsessed with slagging off the Left and anarchists it can hardly be surprising. This siege mentality is not confined to its paper: years of 'squaddist' organising (they have spent the last 15 years in a never-ending battle with the far-right) have not made for an open and democratic structure. This is fine

The SWP is essentially a middle class party, representing those on the left of the middle class who believe capitalism is disorganised and 'unfair'

**SWP**

The Socialist Workers Party is the biggest left group in Britain today with the same membership numbers (4–6,000) as they have had for the last 25 years, but the leadership remains the same!

The SWP is renowned for two things. Firstly, calling for strikes, whatever the situation. This policy has led to demoralisation and a loss of respect for not only themselves, but also for the very idea of fighting and winning. Secondly, opportunism. Essentially this means they chop and change policies from week to week on a vampire-like basis that whatever brings in



if you're a 'crew' fighting fascists, but different rules apply when it comes to organising openly and working with other groups.

Violence is a strong part of their culture, both internally and externally. A typical example of this is their Glasgow organiser who threatened a Class War Celtic supporter with a knife for the heinous crime of selling a Celtic fanzine on what he considered his turf. It is very difficult to reconcile this type of behaviour with their more recent attempts to 'celebrate the political independence of the working class'. Their organiser's violent sectarian behaviour has been the subject of at least one document circulating around the Left, and he has recently tried to explain this by referring to a dispute within anti-fascist groups, but his sectarian behaviour goes back years before this and remains a problem.

This example is far from unique within Red Action, which is logical when you consider the content of their paper – when it comes to anarchists in particular, it has taken sectarianism to absurd and obsessive levels. To be fair to Red Action members some have been embarrassed by their paper's attitude, but the best they can come up with is to explain that 'London' produce the paper and it's not their views. But what sort of organisation has a membership so wilfully unable to influence what its own paper says? One that is still much closer to the SWP in organisation and practice than they like to think, particularly when it comes to the matter of leaders and followers. Perhaps when *Counter-Information* described them as 'Leninist bootboys', they weren't a million miles from the truth.

Another feature of Red Action is that they are unable to accept, in any circumstances, that they may be wrong. They will argue they are right, and everyone else isn't, till the cows come home. Their favourite quote is how the Left is about as dangerous as a pond full of ducks. True, but for 'the Left' read 'everyone but Red Action' – their breathtakingly arrogant attitude is 'if only everyone else were like us...'. Red Action also do a nice turn in hypocrisy. They've been slinging lies, smears and disinformation towards everyone else for many years, but they get very self-righteous and hot under the collar when the finger's pointed at them (see the editorial in RA#73 for details).

We could go on and on here, but there's little point: most people who've come into contact with this group know what they're like. Red Action, no doubt, will do their usual hatchet job in reply. Red Action have made their bed, now they must lie in it... almost certainly alone.

IWCA

As the rest of the Left prove that change for them means no change at all, we should at least consider those who are presenting something a little different. One organisation worthy of note is the recently formed Independent Working Class Association, which came into existence in October 1995, with invites going out to all left groups to attend initial meetings.

The IWCA's *Declaration of Independence* espouses sound, down-to-earth ideas on political organisation, it emphasises community and working class involvement and stresses the need for a radical alternative to Labour. The basic principle behind the IWCA was not what the working class can do for the IWCA, but what the working class can do for itself; this notion that ideas do not have to be given to people ready-packed in an ideology is itself a refreshing and positive step.

With its aim of working class power in working class areas, the IWCA's politics on the surface seem to fit in well with Class War's, and appear to have been taken in part from our own 1993 political statement *Childhood's End*. But Class War's response has been mixed – some groups and individuals did attend the initial meetings, while others didn't. Over the years we'd seen several unlikely alliances come and go on the left, and there seemed no guarantee that this one would be any different – especially since its main sponsor was Red Action.

Our attitude to Red Action has been made clear above, so we won't repeat ourselves here. Red Action had treated the anarchist movement with contempt for many years, so it seemed at best ironic (and at worst cynical and manipulative) that they seemed to be 'targeting' anarchist groups for involvement in the IWCA.

There has also been unease over Red Action using their dominant position within Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) to push the IWCA strongly upon AFA – particularly after years of Red Action opposing any broadening of AFA's limited brief. The danger is that if the IWCA splinters, then AFA's effectiveness could be compromised. In fact suspicions about the IWCA's independence and Red Action's agenda have already



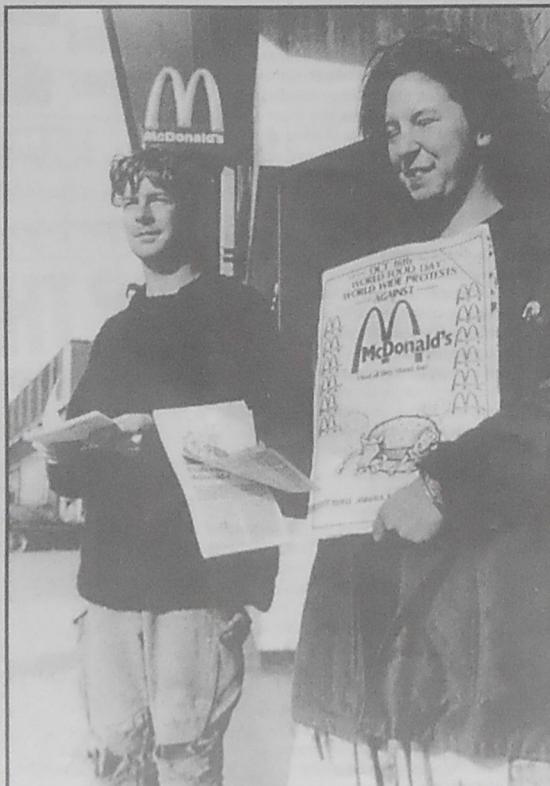
There was a clear anarcho presence in the campaign against the CJA

meant that some left and anarchist groups have withdrawn.

Were the cynics right? Well, not exactly. Various IWCA projects are up and running: in Birmingham, for example, the anti-mugging initiative set up by the IWCA has formed the basis for a residents' association which is anti-police and anti-council, and is led by neither Red Action nor the IWCA. This is exactly the push for working class power that local Class War groups have been promoting for years. Perhaps the IWCA can evolve into a truly independent group that will enable working class militants to work together. Only time will tell.

ANARCHY

The 'official' anarchist movement is pretty well unknown to most people in this country. In fact the organised anarchist groups are probably at their weakest since the mid-60s. The 'unofficial' anarchist movement appears to remain the same as ever with good publications out periodically (like *Schnews*, and outbreaks of headline direct action, e.g. Claremont, M41, Newbury etc.



It's hard to say anything good about the official anarcho groups. Dogmatism, egos, small-mindedness, sectarianism, feuding and a lack of ambition... you name it, they've got it! Every group in Britain suffers from the above as well, so maybe we shouldn't be too hard. But hang on – these groups (including Class War) are part of a great historical tradition and part of a set of politics that can finally sort things out for the better. We hold the memory of past revolutions in Russia, Germany and Spain, of strikes, sit-ins, walkouts and takeovers, of thousands who fought and gave their lives for their futures and all of ours. If we believe that we are the basis for a future revolutionary movement, and if we believe that the working class will make a revolution and that it can only do so with the knowledge of past struggles and with international connections, then we must do better.

We must accept that it is no good just holding a flame for past glories nor being self-satisfied in the knowledge that the SWP is led by a bunch of Trot wasters. If we are revolutionaries, it is our job to make revolution. And yes, there are going to be disagreements on how, but isn't that partly what makes us revolutionaries in the first place – a belief in the necessity in a society of diversity and debate as opposed to the neo-totalitarianism of all of the Left?

We could list every individual anarcho group, mention how small they are, and wonder why they can't see where they are going and why they think they're growing when they clearly are not. But this would mean falling into the same trap of snide sectarianism – that way lies perpetual irrelevance and continual defeat.

The 'unorganised' (but usually very organised) anarcho movement has enjoyed a relative resurgence over the last few years (although we hardly need to point out that they remain marginal). This movement can be divided into three areas: firstly, the notable anarcho presence in many local support and solidarity groups; secondly, the information groups like *Schnews* and *Counter-Information*; thirdly 'direct action' (DA) which has seen a major revival, essentially in support of environmental campaigns.

All credit to this new wave of DA but few of the campaigns appeared to have a generalised political or theoretical basis. They appeared to be emotive reactions to single issues, however highly motivated and well-organised reactions. Those campaigns that did develop some sort of theory tended towards deep ecology. This lack of a political understanding of what they were fighting (and worse a collection of 'fluffy' anarcho-hippy ideas) led to isolation, in most cases, from those around them. Many protesters never linked what they were doing with the community but saw their struggle in terms of 'the earth'. However, others who did see the connections felt they could not run both a DA campaign and campaign locally, which is a fair point. Many DA groups also suffer both from the 'tyranny of structurelessness' (they are often dominated by individuals and clichés as any Leninist party) and also from militarism – an obsession with secrecy, actions, the 'pigs' and the belief that commitment conquers all. ●

Make your own tea

Women's Realm and other recipes and patterns

This piece is written for all revolutionaries. This is not the token 'women's bit' that's stuck in for the sake of appearances. This is an attempt to look at how and why the Left, and Class War in particular, has not just failed to attract women, but alienated, patronised and looked upon them as a minority group. How can half the working class be treated as a minority? We're not claiming that we have solutions for the gender imbalance but we are saying that it's time to stop ignoring the problem. Any revolutionary movement which doesn't address why there are so few women in its ranks isn't a true revolutionary movement, just a complacent reflection of the status quo.

DAZED AND CONFUSED

In the early years of Class War, the attitude was that feminist demands did not go far enough. We said why call for equal pay? Equal rights under capitalism was putting out a begging bowl for equal gender exploitation and was spectacularly unambitious. Class War were calling not for equal pay packets but for the abolition of money. The feminist fixation with voting rights was another half measure. Why choose between two evils when there's so much more to be had? Class War tried to support the principle of gender equality while disagreeing with the reformist tendencies of established feminism.

In the mid-1980s the Left was in its victim stage. 'All men are bad, all women are good' arguments were being waged by feminists who wanted the moral advantage and brownie points. Class War wasn't about pushing the politics of middle class guilt. By showing images of women who were taking control of their lives and fighting back, Class War thought it was supporting working class women. Whether it was or not is up for discussion, but the paper's intentions were honourable. The approach was simplistic, but at least it wasn't as confused as other sections of the Left - who were dancing round Goddess-based 'alternative' religions and calling them politics.

Class War's early issues show that there was a commitment to talking to all the working class as opposed to just young white males. Cervical cancer information sat on the same page as 'Battered Bobby'. Articles about sexism (admittedly basic and often moralistic as opposed to libertarian) made regular appearances. The politics were often misguided, with one article offering instructions to working class men to support women's struggles by offering physical protection. This paternalistic attitude reflected society's but it didn't make it right.

But to put Class War in context, other lefty groups and papers had even worse attitudes. Militant and the SWP's politics were so entrenched in old-fashioned rhetoric that women only featured in their papers when they slotted into the traditional 'worker slot'. Grunwick was their finest hour: workers who were women and Asian to boot. Women Against Pit Closures and 'miners' wives' were the only other photos of a woman they'd use. Those pictures from 1977 and 1984 had to see them through almost 20 years of papers.

In 1987 a Brixton woman wrote to Class War questioning our coverage of the Brixton riots. She said that living in a police no-go area had ended not in Utopia, but in women suffering intimidation, physical and sexual violence. To Class War's credit, the paper responded with an article about the dangers of romanticising violence, and started up a debate about

communities providing their own policing.

However, a lot of women who agree with Class War's aims and principles, think the organisation is too Boy's Own to become involved with. Class War's attitude to violence is alienating for women - no amount of wishful thinking will alter the fact that working class men and women have very different attitudes to violence. Class War's hard image, its music and boots are meant to attract young, white males. It's questionable whether concentrating on attracting one area of the working class (and alienating other sections of it) is worth the price, but even on its own terms this tactic fails.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, MUM?

Looking at Class War in isolation won't tell us much about why the Left has put gender politics on the back-burner. Class War came in to being at a time when the women's movement was in crisis. Without sketching a rough run-down of some of the events that preceded that crisis, it's impossible to challenge the cliché that feminism is merely the plaything of the middle classes.

In lefty circles all you have to do to discredit a movement or an idea is call it middle class. It's become a non-specific term of abuse. The feminist movement did have a lot of middle class women in it, but that doesn't mean that all of them opposed the interests of working class women. Nor does it mean that feminist ideas aren't useful to working class women.

In the early seventies feminist ideas began to permeate through society. The media (as always) looked for leaders and personalities. Rather than talk about the anger, the ideas and the needs that were propelling feminism forward, the emphasis was on individuals. Germaine Greer and Co. fitted the media bill.

But this didn't stop women seizing the idea of liberation. Suddenly there were theories which explained why life was so miserable for the majority of women. The middle classes were the first to catch them because they had more access to education, but many working class women weren't all that far behind. The only solution to women's troubles was to change society, which was the last thing that the right wanted.



Class War wasn't about pushing the politics of middle class guilt. By showing images of women who were taking control of their lives and fighting back, Class War thought it was supporting working class women

Grunwick 1977 – the only way the Left can relate to women in struggle

Women got down to the serious job of showing we'd no longer tolerate male domination and violence. In 1972 the first refuge for battered women opened. In 1976 the first Rape Crisis Centre opened, run on feminist lines. It mushroomed and by the mid-1980s there were centres in almost every city.

The Reclaim The Night marches started in Soho in protest against the exploitation of the sex industry. The women's movement was making it up as it went along - and at that point it hadn't had to take account of the views of women actually working in the industry. In Leeds and York the Reclaim The Night marches took on a different significance. Peter Sutcliffe, the so-called 'Yorkshire Ripper', was still on the loose in Northern industrial towns. We were sick of living in a climate of fear, of being told that the only way to stay safe was to stay indoors or under male protection.

Last but not least we'd had enough of the state and media distinction between 'good' and 'bad' girls; between the prostitute women who the media implied deserved to be murdered, and the good, asexual, family-type women who didn't. Feminism provided the framework for women to realise that we had a right to be sexual and safe. We were angrily rejecting the hypocritical morality of the times as well as celebrating our presence on the streets.

WOMEN: THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME TO ME

The women's liberation movement had its own internal problems. The rhetoric of 'sisterhood' above all else meant that class and race, other great defining aspects of our lives, were in danger of being buried under the 'all girls together' mentality. Working class and non-white women fought the fallacy that class and race were less important than gender. They said that middle class women were fighting for their independence from patriarchy, while keeping the perks of their class. Working class women weren't trying to destroy sisterhood; they were insisting that it be made more substantial. Some working class women said that sisterhood had to start with income sharing.

Black women refused to let the reality of having to live in a racist society be obscured by an umbrella of sisterhood. The women's liberation movement was predominantly white and middle class, but to say that the white middle class women constantly held sway is to under-value black and working class women's contributions. They forced the women's liberation movement to take account of them - whether it wanted to or not. In 1978 *The Working Class Women's Liberation Newsletter* was launched. To go along with the myth that working class women played no part in changing society, is to repeat the lie that we were too thick to read the writing on the wall, and add our own quotes.

Separatism helped create more schisms and split feminism into non-complementary strands. The main bugbear was whether women working or having relationships with men were letting the side down by fraternising with 'the enemy'. In retrospect separatism looks like just more Stalinist power-play. Arguments about desire and free choice were put down to women trying to hang on their 'heterosexual privilege'. Capitalism's privileges weren't given much attention. No wonder the women's movement split.

Despite internal sex wars, the women's movement continued to have a positive influence on society. The one good thing about radical feminism was that it taught women to recognise the full extent of male domination. Women who chose not to live or work apart from men finally picked up on the way that trade unions/political groups/partners made few concessions to women. The revolutionary movement was found wanting.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The women's movement would have survived and still politically progressed if the right hadn't intervened. The American Weyrich was the first of many new right leaders to declare feminist women a threat to state power: "There are people who want a different political

order. Symbolised by the women's liberation movement, they believe the future for their political power lies in the restructuring of the traditional family, and in downgrading the male or the father role in the traditional family."

Thatcher and her followers had their own think-tanks which drew the same conclusions. By the mid-1980s equality seemed like a sensible proposition to most women, so the media responded by declaring that feminism was outdated, a 1970s thing like flares. 'Post-feminism' was the new thing. It came complete with a younger generation who hated the women's movement. 'Post-feminist' was anti-feminist and it was set off not by women achieving their demands but by the fact that they looked in danger of getting too stroppy, too much of a threat.

The old feminist 'leadership' were now part of the media establishment. Greer and Co. happily went back on their past calls for equality and independence. The new, revisionist line was that feminism had robbed us of our right to be mothers and home bodies. Greer declared that the model woman was the old-fashioned peasant wife up to her neck in onions and kids. One after another the old guard trundled out to tell us that women were at their most fulfilled when their influence was restricted to the home-front. Unsurprisingly, the media loved this U-turn and printed every word of it. It was the worst sort of careerism, but the right has always diffused subversive ideas by rewarding changes of opinion. Post-feminist theory smelled a lot like old-fashioned servitude.

YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND ME IN THE KITCHEN AT PARTIES

Class War was formed at the height of this period of post-feminism. The entire Left was confused by the infighting and the right's full-scale assault. Class War didn't stand back and look at what was happening, but neither did anybody else. It was a time when one after another all the women's papers collapsed under the weight of the onslaught. Feminism was too old hat to be bought, so most of the radical women's papers folded. The only voices we were hearing were the new right and its lackeys telling us to get back into the kitchen.

It's an elaborate confidence trick. The new right wants us in the traditional wifey mode, but it also wants our wage labour. The post-feminist line is that the modern women can have freedom through work, and still have the 'fulfilment' of running a home.

Capitalism needs women to work. The far right's shift to economic 'rationalism' and the expansion of the low-paid service industries mean that cheap



Post-feminism has a cute chorus-line of girls flashing their knickers as a sign of liberation – they're Stepford Wives with better thighs, and a carefully programmed attitude

labour is always in demand. And as far as capital is concerned, nothing comes cheaper than women. Capitalism's motto is: if you want to shell out less money and make more profits, employ women – they're worth less.

Nine out of ten single parents are women, and even in two-parent households many women are the main bread-winner; yet capitalism still pretends that women's wages are 'pin money'. Women don't need a living wage, because we don't actually have to live off it. Despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary, men are still seen as the main 'providers'. Our wages pay for the little extras: food, shelter and warmth. And as we get older, in a society which judges women on appearance, we become worthless.

Single mothers on benefit are the group who have borne the worst of the post-feminism backlash. Capitalism has outlawed all non-monetary relations. In a capitalist society to have no money is to have no identity. We're not what we eat, but where we work and what we earn. Single mothers have been targeted because their existence threatens the right's social, political and economic aims. Hence the constant media attacks and housing and benefit cuts. 'Back to Basics' blamed everything from loose morals to the rising crime rate on single mothers.

Work and wages – no matter how menial and low – are often cited as proof that we've achieved our objectives and no longer need feminism. Try telling the woman who gets up at six to clean offices, that if she worked harder she too could have two homes and inter-continental air travel. The role models post-feminism holds up as 'successful' women (scum like Anita Roddick) get to the top by promoting ruthless capitalism. Gender plays no part in their story – other than their having to prove that their killer instincts are twice as sharp as men's.

One of capitalism's strategies for reducing wages is to take what has traditionally been 'men's work' – manufacturing etc – automate the plant and then bring in 'unskilled' women at a lower rate of pay. Then it is women, rather than capitalism's sharp practice, who are blamed for men being chucked out of the workforce.

Post-feminism also makes a big fuss about women's nurturing natures – we're supposed to like being dogs bodies. In 81 per cent of (two adult) homes where a woman works full-time, she's still responsible for the washing and ironing and the bulk of the domestic jobs. Maybe 'we've made it' means the beds. We're still acting as unpaid domestic servants; the only real change is that many men think they do more. There's a million excuses for why not, but men rarely take an equal share of cooking and household chores.

Revolutionary groups seldom address the day-to-day inequalities in their own kitchens. Issues around housework are seen as trivial. Twenty years ago the expression for it was 'women's work'. Lefty 'man' may claim to be fighting for the freedom of mankind, but that doesn't mean he wants his girlfriend to stop doing his washing.

Part of the problem is that housework has been tagged 'personal politics'. 'Personal' like 'middle class'

is just another way of saying irrelevant to the overall struggle. Class War has always understood that 'politics' is about improving the day-to-day realities of our lives. Unfortunately, that understanding doesn't seem to extend to women. Too often issues are prioritised on the grounds of whether or not they make men feel heroic. Rioting does; shopping doesn't. Washing up just doesn't get the adrenalin going: ask any woman.

GET YOUR TITS OUT FOR THE LASSES

Post-feminism has a cute chorus-line of girls flashing their knickers as a sign of liberation. We've got the *Girlie Show*, *The Pyjama Party* and the Spice Girls sticking their tits and their tongues out on prime-time TV. All three were put together by blokes. We're supposed to see them as symbols of the new 'sassy' woman, but all are a bloke's idea of the perfect feminist. They make a lot of noise but never say anything which actually threatens the status quo. They're Stepford Wives with better thighs, and a carefully programmed attitude. They're go-go dancing for equality.

At the same time there's a constant media crusade to show us what a dangerous place the world is for women. Less than eight per cent of all violent crimes are sexual attacks on women (the highest mortality rate is among young working class men), but the media loves to highlight our rapes and murders by deranged strangers. The message is that we need the security of male protection. The sub-text is: your relationship might be crap and abusive but look how much worse off you'd be without him! The irony is that at least a third of all women killed in Britain are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends – the majority just after they declare their independence by breaking off the relationship.

WILL THIS MOVEMENT MOVE ME?

We don't live in an equal world. We need a feminist analysis as much as we ever did. All around us the gains of the last thirty years are under attack. The Left bowed out of women's struggles years ago, and since there isn't really a women's movement to speak of, individual women are left to slug it out alone. The whole point in joining a movement is to fight alongside people who share the same ideals and dreams. There's not much incentive for women to join revolutionary groups when the general ethos is: you can fight our battles but we're not interested in yours.

Women join revolutionary organisations because they want to change the whole of society not just the sexist bit. But to survive within them we end up having to 'put up and shut up'. Just because we've prioritised class and capitalism as major oppressions doesn't mean that we don't give a shit about gender.

The old chestnut about 'single issues' distracting the focus of the struggle has been dragged out too many times when women's struggles come up. The anti-JSA campaign or prisoner support are 'single issues'; race, class and gender aren't. We can't pick up and put down our class, our skin colour or our sex. Whatever comes after Class War needs to take a less one-dimensional approach. We don't know what will make a unified movement, but we do know what won't: ignorance.

No one is 'just' working class, 'just' a woman, 'just' black. Our politics are a mesh of different experiences, and half the time there's no cosy alliance between our different oppressions. A woman's experiences under patriarchy help shape her perceptions of class. We've been guilty of pretending that working class men and women would all live happily ever after once we've banished capitalism. Not if we still have one half serving the other half. Life isn't simple. Those who are our comrades in one area may well turn out to be against us in another. When conflict comes up we're forced to say what matters most; sometimes it's our class and sometimes it isn't. We have to acknowledge difficulties before we can start to deal with them. We don't know if we can resolve these dilemmas but we're certainly willing to try. ●



Getting organised

When Class War started, we saw ourselves as standing in opposition to virtually every other political organisation existing in the UK. Arrogant? Maybe. But we stood in total opposition to the Left's traditional hierarchical way of doing things and we wanted some new form of organisation to match our politics. We weren't setting out to 'save' the working class - how could we when we saw ourselves as part of that class? Our message has always been the same: our class does not need organisations to lead it to salvation - do-it-yourself! As we saw it, this meant entering uncharted territory, as we tried to bypass the perverted crap that passes for most 'revolutionary' politics, and develop something new.

Over the course of the next few years, some members argued for Class War to become something akin to a tight-knit cadre organisation, with maximum theoretical and tactical unity around a commonly agreed programme. Others pushed for more of a broad church where the Fed would operate as an umbrella organisation, maybe even embracing separate anarchist and communist groups under one roof. In actual fact we opted for neither strategy. Instead we ended up with the worst aspects of both, and wasted loads of time re-inventing the wheel.

To put it another way; having started as something shapeless and almost uncontrollable, Class War progressively narrowed its vision and lost one ambition after another. The global, shit-kicking outlook got watered down by ever more sectarian, one-dimensional ways of thinking. From a vibrant and healthy (if unstructured) 'group', the Federation stagnated so that within a couple of years of the anti-poll tax movement, huge amounts of energy were being expended on internal bureaucracy - amending the constitution, electing a whole raft of full-time 'officers', tinkering with the Aims & Principles, drafting proposals and counter-proposals for conference, and the usual political politicking. And all this for an organisation that never exceeded a membership of 150!

None of this is really new or exclusive to Class War - it seems to be part of the inevitable dynamics of political organisation. Institutional politics gradually suffocate imagination and what was once dynamic becomes merely dogmatic.

But maybe it's also a consequence of the fact that the way we organise as revolutionaries doesn't seem to have changed much over the last hundred years. 1897 or 1897? Despite all our big talk and grand ambitions, Class War's organisation has ended up hardly different from a

revolutionary outfit at the turn of the century. Like them we have a readership, a passive

membership, an active membership (which in our case constitutes the effective 'leadership'), a paper, a fitful 'journal', delegates, conferences, etc., etc.

So we come back to the same old problem. Most of what passes for 'revolutionary' politics in this country is fucked. Isn't it about time we tried to come up with some new form of organisation? And how do we go about organising without the organisation taking over?

BEDSITS & BARRICADES

In non-revolutionary times like this, there are two standard ways of coping. The first is to turn back to theory, to the security of some more or less academic version of marxism-leftism-anarchism-communism-autonomism - sometimes backed up by the vague idea that 'we're in a downturn and it's time for quality not quantity'. This approach is often supported by some sort of spontaneist theory - which loosely translates as 'it'll be alright on the night'. The working class will eventually become aware of its historic mission and sweep away capitalism and in so doing throw up new forms of organisation and politics. In fact some variants of this even suggest that to be organised in the here and now is actually counter-revolutionary as any form of organisation today will be inevitably corrupted by bourgeois thinking. This is the twilight world of the ultra-left, where you don't really have to do anything except read obscure Belgian journals and slag each other off in densely worded articles...

We've got nothing against conscious attempts to increase our understanding of the world - that is part of what we need. But the 'theory' solution smacks too much of a retreat from the real world, of pure bedsit intellectualism - a turning-inward when we should be trying to look out more. And as for 'non-organisation', well it's a luxury we just cannot afford. Only a fool could imagine that we can get from here to some better world without a form of organisation along the way.

The second traditional response is almost the exact opposite: activism and the 'kick it till it breaks' tendency. If the theory types defend their strategy by arguing that there's nothing going on, the activists act as if worldwide proletarian revolution is just around the corner - 'It's happening now, man!' This is a less sophisticated version of voluntarism - which loosely translates as 'if you want it enough, it will happen'. If you're a Bolshevik, it means selling more and more papers, recruiting like mad and

Paper-sellers & paper-readers... Is that all there is to organisation?



pushing for revolution; for anarchists, it translates as activist groups - leafleting, picketing, anti-fascist work, always thinking that if we all 'do' a little more, the system will come tumbling down.

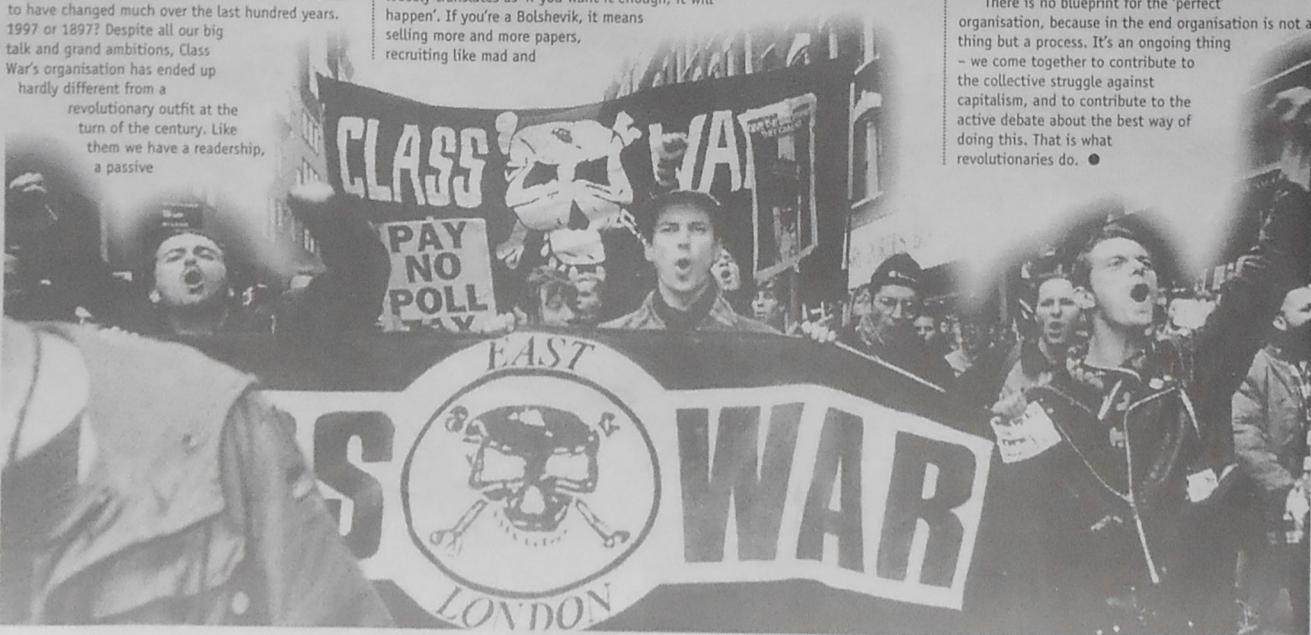
Now, while we all know which of the above we'd rather have alongside us in a riot, we're not convinced that running around like headless chickens is necessarily more 'revolutionary' than sitting with your nose in a book. In practice, the activist position is bound up with a very moralist approach to politics - if you don't or can't 'get involved', then you are somehow worthless. And in the end it only seems to produce burn-out and bitterness.

RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL

In fact both approaches - the activist/voluntarist and the intellectual/spontaneist - have been present within Class War, and both share the same underlying attitude: just like the traditional Left they are more oriented towards the needs of individuals within the group than the needs of the wider working class. The sad fact is that most groups (including, in the end, Class War) do things not because they believe it will affect the world, but to defend their own integrity and maintain their sense of identity (this is the 'group patriotism' that we're determined to destroy).

We think it's time to rethink the whole idea of political organisation. What is 'being organised' all about? Why do we do it? Organisation is organisation for a specific purpose. It might sound obvious but people come together to do something. We come together as revolutionaries to organise and contribute to struggle, and to deepen our understanding of the world around us. Maybe it's time for us to turn the question of organisation on its head: it's not a problem to be solved by adopting this or that platform or this or that structure. It's not something that you can 'solve'.

There is no blueprint for the 'perfect' organisation, because in the end organisation is not a thing but a process. It's an ongoing thing - we come together to contribute to the collective struggle against capitalism, and to contribute to the active debate about the best way of doing this. That is what revolutionaries do. •



Beyond the bullshit

IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

In this issue of the paper we have been as honest and as frank as we can. We have taken the bold step of getting our dirty washing out in public. Being self-critical can seem negative, but we believe that this is now the most positive thing to do.

At the moment, there's no other group on the left that has the courage to do what we have done. They will quite happily carry on trudging (and we do mean trudging) along the same path, using the same formulas, spouting the same old tired shit, in blind obedience to their doctrines and leaders. They are never allowed, and never want, to admit that maybe they have got it all wrong. One thing that has set us apart from the rest of the Left is that we have always believed that the working class movement towards revolution is the most important thing, and that Class War would only have a limited part to play in this.

To go forward you have to look in the past, to see your mistakes. This we have done over the past few years, and in this issue. It hasn't been all bad: we have had some great times, our politics have been fun and we have had an effect out of all proportion to our size. But at the same time there was always the frustration that for every person involved in the Federation there were another ten who agreed with what we said but kept their distance – people who read the paper regularly, who bought the T-shirt, who flocked to line up behind our banners on marches, but who never felt able to commit themselves further to our organised politics.

THE FED STRIKES BACK

You might be dismayed at the basic frankness and tone of this paper. It is a departure from the type of propaganda that we have always produced in the past, but while we may be saying things differently, there is no departure from our politics. In fact, quite the opposite: it

is only because we can now see the potential for re-founding the revolutionary movement that we are taking the unprecedented step of dissolving the Class War Federation.

With sales of 4,000 for every issue, *Class War* is almost certainly the biggest paper on the left apart from *Socialist Worker*. For some groups this would be their idea of heaven. Yet it is because we want so much more that we are now dissolving. Our underlying thought is this: if just fifty people organised into a Federation have achieved this much, what could we do if there are five hundred of us or five thousand?

The upshot of what we've said here is that we need new ways of organising ourselves that can appeal to all the working class, male and female, young and old, black and white. *Class War* has gone as far as it can go, and while it still exists our movement will not be able to move on to something better.

It's not down to us as *Class War* to say how we should organise, that's for the men and women who take part to decide. But we are taking the initiative by organising a number of conferences, to create some sort of national forum for revolutionaries. From informal chats we already know there is a groundswell of support for this. Over the next few months we will be pushing the idea as widely as possible and we urge you to do likewise.

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU

As libertarians we aim to motivate rather than lead, empower rather than act as a vanguard. It's a difficult task given the complete and utter political alienation of the working class from both mainstream and radical politics. But if we want to move our politics beyond the shadows of the Left – which, not to put too fine a point on it, is fucked – we need imagination, dedication, education, collaboration and a vision.

Individually we may have some of the answers, but it's only by

collaborating that we can come up with a practical programme which we can get on with.

If you agree with the gist of what we've written – bearing in mind that we've written it 'from the heart', and not as some piece of lefty theory – we appeal to you to get involved. We don't care what you call yourself – anarchist, communist, Sagittarius – but the bottom line will be a commitment to libertarian class struggle politics: party-builders, hacks, cynics and armchair theorists need not apply.

Don't believe the hype: capitalism has not gone away, the class struggle continues and there are huge social battles looming on the horizon. Let's get to work...

★ SMASH THE STATE

★ DEATH TO THE RULING CLASS

★ ALL POWER TO THE WORKING CLASS

Dates and venues for conferences will be decided over the next few months – you can keep in touch with us by ringing the Hotline on 0117 907 3667, writing to the National Secretary at PO Box 3241, Saltley, Birmingham B8 3DP, or contacting your regional CW contact:

SCOTLAND: PO Box 1021, Edinburgh EH8 9PW
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